

2005 SHAREHOLDERS REPORT

The Lake Superior Area DNR wildlife management team has a lot going on in your area. Through this year-end newsletter we would like to share some information with you about the things we have been working on and invite you to participate in enjoying and managing Wisconsin's wildlife resources.

THE DNR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT TEAM

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Turkeys Still Gobbling Up a Storm

A little less than two years after the release of 164 wild turkeys at six sites in Bayfield and Douglas Counties, reports and observations indicate those releases now account for roughly 800 birds. That's a 388 percent increase since March, 2004. Wildlife managers agree that this number is likely conservative, since fewer reports are being received as the public becomes more familiar with seeing turkeys. The initial success of these birds far exceeds the managers' original expectations.



southern populations, or unauthorized private releases of game farm stock.

In March 2006, wildlife staff released an additional 53 turkeys at two locations within the agricultural area of Iron County, near Saxon. Support for these releases were provided by the National Wild Turkey

Federation (NWTF), and the Snowbelt Longbeards Chapter of NWTF. This local NWTF chapter also provided support for the Bayfield County releases just two years ago.

In Bayfield County, observations of turkeys have been reported from throughout the northern 2/3rds of the County, with the largest congregations of birds being seen within a few miles of the original release sites. Flocks originating from these releases have now expanded into western Ashland County as well. In Douglas County, the turkeys appear to have disbursed less, but good numbers are found within six miles of each release site. Several groups of birds are being reported in other locations in each County, likely originating from wild flocks moving north from established

In 2006, spring hunts will be held in three new Turkey Management Zones (44, 45 and 46) in northern Wisconsin. Zones 45 and 46 include Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland and Iron Counties, and hunting of turkeys originating from the releases will be allowed, however the number of permits available in Zone 46, where most of these birds are located, was limited to only 150 issued for the entire Zone. Wildlife staff is confident that this initial hunt will have no negative effect on local populations, and will allow for another year of excellent turkey brood production and population expansion.

NEW ARCHERY OPPORTUNITIES

Archery opportunities have increased with the creation of two new archery shooting ranges. One was established on the Brule River State Forest (BRSF) at the After-hours Cross Country Ski Trail and another was established in Pence across from the town hall.

The After-hours Archery Trail, which opened in fall 2005, utilizes the cross-country ski trails and parking lot during the snow-free period of the year. The trail was built by BRSF staff and members of the newly formed Brule River Archery Club. The project was funded by donations from the Douglas County Fish and Game League, Brule River Sportsman Club, and the WDNR. The trail consists of a 29-excelior target course, a walk-through design, including shots ranging from 10 to 70 yards. Field points must be used on the excelsior backstops but there is a sand trap for broadheads located at the trailhead behind the warming shack. There is no fee to use the range, but donations are welcome. Additional information about this range can be obtained from the BRSF at 715-372-5678 or visit the club website at: www.brulearcheryclub.com



The Pence Archery Range which opened in 2004 is located on the north side of HWY 77 in Pence. The Full Draw Archery Club, with a lot of donated money and time, built and maintains this range. Numerous sponsors donated \$100 each towards the purchase of 3-D targets. The range is open to the public for a membership fee to the Full Draw Archery Club.

The local Youth Archery Program also uses the range and many area youth are getting their first taste of the sport of archery here. There are measured sight-in targets ranging from 10 to 30 yards. The field course consists of 30 3-D



targets off a path that winds through the woods. Questions about this range should be directed to John Windt at (715) 561-5044.

Along with the new ranges, the Archery in Schools Program is flourishing in the northwoods. The Mercer School District, with financial assistance from the Northwoods Wildlife & Wetlands Club, Lionesses, PTSA and individuals, began an Archery in Schools Program this school year. The Pence Youth Archery Program is patterned somewhat after this program. The students have been very receptive and interest has been high in these new opportunities to develop this life-long sport.

Superior and Maple-Northwestern schools have or are in the process of including Archery in the Schools Program as part of their physical education curriculum. Archery will be an optional 2-week course for interested students. Costs to establish these new programs are being shared with WDNR, National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Douglas County Fish and Game League.

2005 BEAR SEASON

The 2005 bear season was no harvest record breaker. The good news is that's how it was planned to be. In the previous several years the harvest was purposefully larger to slowly reduce the bear population to levels similar to the early 1990's. The public has told us that this was a more acceptable population level. The department intentionally took several years to accomplish this goal to avoid unpredictable harvest and potential over-harvest of bears which have a much lower reproductive rate than most wildlife species.

The statewide harvest goal of 2,500 bears was achieved with approximately 2,490 harvested in 2005. The harvest goal for 2006 will be 2,525 bears statewide with about 4,370 permits available. There will be 685 permits available for Zone A1 and 1475 in Zone A for 2006. Bear populations in zones B and C are also stable or increasing and permit levels will be the same or slightly higher in 2006. Hunting applications are due the Friday nearest January 15 annually.

This past fall was the first year implementing the new rule allowing successful class A bear

license applicants to transfer their permit to first-time bear hunters ages 12 to 17. The transfer is intended will allow young hunters an opportunity to hunt bear without requiring them to wait the 5-7 years it normally takes to obtain a permit. Applications for transfer must be made by August 1st, prior to the bear season.

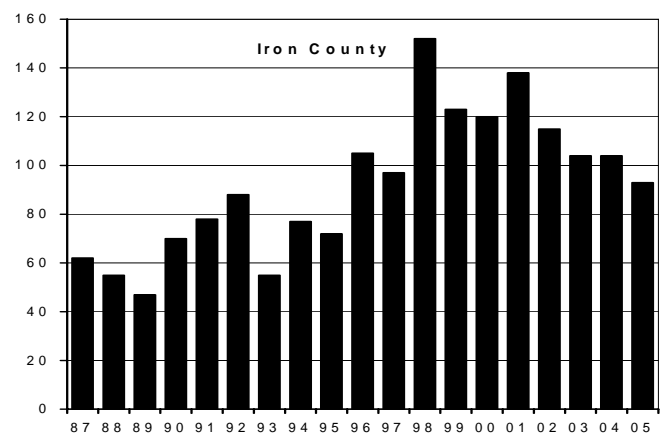
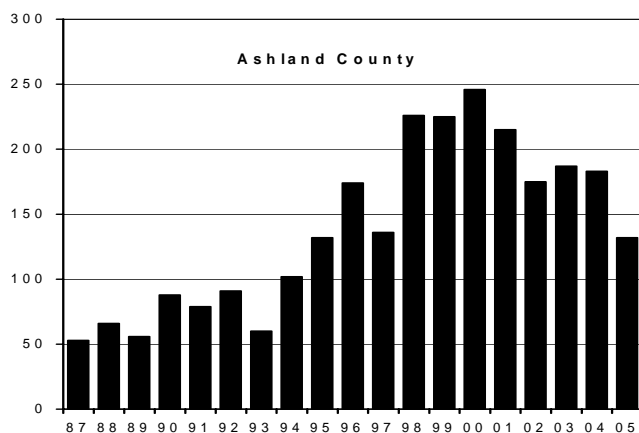
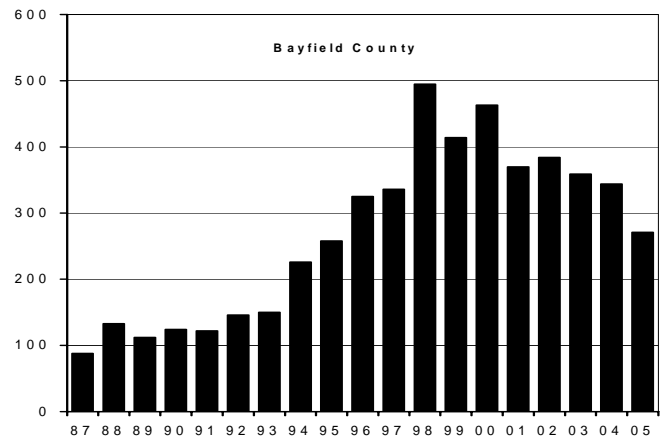
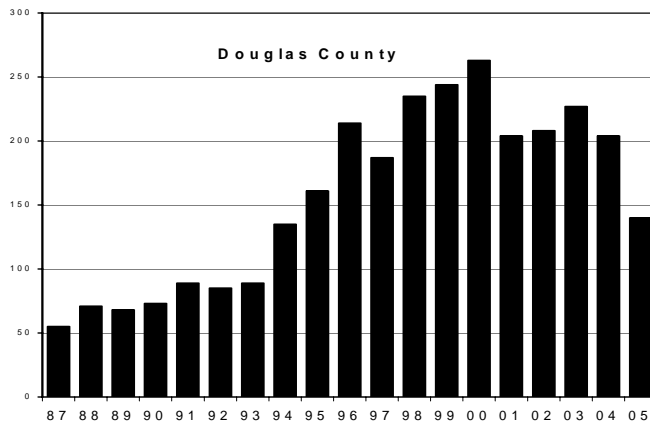
A trial "Learn to Hunt Bear" program was also offered in 2005 for 14 youth, 4 of which were designated for terminally ill children. This trial program was received very well and the department is proposing to offer a portion of the unsold permits annually to be used for these two innovative programs to enrich youth participation in bear hunting.

2006 Hunting Season Dates (Zones A and A1)

September 6-12: Hunting with the aid of bait and other methods **not** utilizing dogs.

Sept. 13- Oct. 3: All legal methods

Oct. 4-10: Hunting with the aid of dogs only.



Invasive Species

Feral Pigs

Feral hogs are an unwanted animal that is a threat to Wisconsin's native flora and fauna. Pigs' habits of wallowing and rooting for food destroy native plants and pose a risk of erosion, especially since many of these areas are in or adjacent to riparian areas. Pigs are known to eat many small mammals, eggs of ground nesting birds, and amphibians as well as agricultural crops. Pigs also compete with deer for food and may act as a reservoir for diseases that are a concern to other wildlife or livestock.



Feral Pigs were first reported in Douglas County in 2002 and reports have steadily increased since then. The DNR, in conjunction with many local landowners and hunters have removed at least 85 feral pigs since August 2005. Hunters and landowners are encouraged to shoot feral pigs whenever possible to prevent them from becoming established.

For further information or to report sightings, please call Greg Kessler at (715) 372-8539 X115.



Buckthorn

Common buckthorn is a problem species mainly in the understory of oak, maple, and riparian woods. It also occurs in pastures, abandoned fields, and roadsides. **Glossy buckthorn** is a problem in wetlands ranging from river floodplains to acidic bogs. Both species cast a dense shade as they mature into tall shrubs. This shading and aggressive competition has a destructive effect on native herbaceous and low shrub plants, and may prevent the establishments of tree seedlings.

Wildlife Management is cooperating with the Bureau of Endangered resources to initiate control efforts on both the Bibon Swamp Natural Area and Inch Lake Natural Area. Control methods include pulling seedlings by hand and using a bark treatment of herbicide to kill individual mature plants. Unfortunately, buckthorns are found in many other local areas notably including Prentice Park, White River Fisheries Area, Brule River State Forest and the Pike Chain of lakes.

Common or Giant Reed Grass

Giant reed grass, also known as Phragmites, is typically found in disturbed or altered wetland habitats such as along roadsides. It tends to form mono-typic stands excluding nearly all competitors as it spreads across the wetland.

Surveys done by Northland College staff identified two large stands located within the Bark Bay Natural Area near Herbster. The Department and the Friends of the South Shore Estuaries (<http://www.fossestuary.org>) have worked 3 years to treat individual plants with herbicide and have nearly completed removal of 6 acres of Phragmites.

To learn more about these and other non-native and invasive plants and animals please visit our website at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives/>



Northern Owl Invasion

The winter of 2004-'05 will long be remembered as the winter of the 'great owl invasion'. Periodically owls that live north of WI move south in the winter when their normal food sources become scarce. We call this an 'invasion' (perhaps our Canadian neighbors call it an exodus!). The number of owls that invaded northern WI last winter was unusually large. The species which moved into our area last winter were the Great Gray Owl (GGO), the Northern Hawk Owl (NHO), and the Boreal Owl (BO).



The GGO with its large size and sheer numbers was the most conspicuous. An estimated 374 GGOs were found in 13 counties in WI during the winter. They are the largest owl in North America in size, but not by weight. They are grayish brown in color with a white throat (white mustache), black chin (black bow tie), and a large round head without ear tufts. They generally live in dense coniferous forest. Their diet consists almost entirely of small rodents. Like most owls they generally are most active at night and during twilight, but it is not uncommon to see them hunting during the day on overcast winter days. In northern WI, which is the south edge of their normal breeding range, they are considered a rare breeding bird.

The NHO is a very 'high latitude' owl that is found around the world in the northern hemisphere. Unlike most other owl species it is diurnal, i.e. active in the daylight. They frequently can be seen perched at high vantage points, tree limbs, or electric line poles, scanning for

prey. Their summer diet consists mostly of small rodents. In the winter their main prey changes to birds. As its name implies it is distinctly hawk-like in appearance. They have a brown barred whitish chest with a long rounded tail and relatively pointed wings. In WI they are considered a regular, but uncommon, winter resident. Last winter 24 NHOs were observed in 8 counties.

The BO which is much smaller and very nocturnal in behavior is much harder to observe and document than the other northern owls. About 10 inches in length, they are deep brown in color with a crown thickly spotted with large white spots. The bill is yellowish in color. They live in northern boreal forests around the world. Primary foods for BOs are small mammals, birds, and insects. While relatively few BOs were observed in WI last winter, observations of large numbers of them in Duluth and northeast MN suggest that many more were in Wisconsin than were observed.

When charismatic birds such as GGOs and NHOs grace our state with winter visits, birders flock in from all over Wisconsin and the Midwest to see them. While the economic impact of this is unknown we do know that many people drove thousands of miles and spent thousands of dollars in our local restaurants and motels for the 'once in a lifetime' owl viewing event.



**Photo: Northern-hawk owl
Laura Erickson 2005**

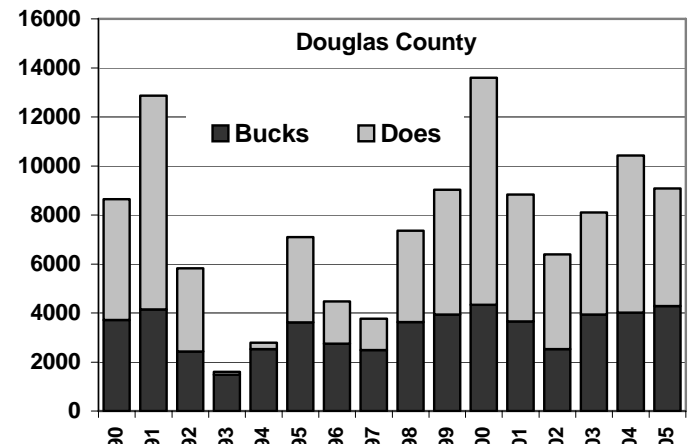
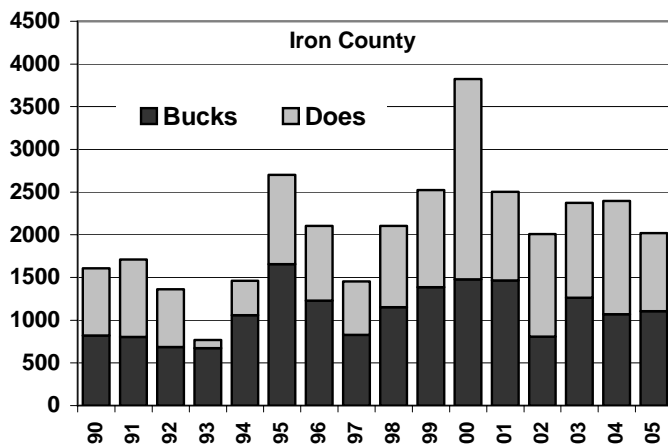
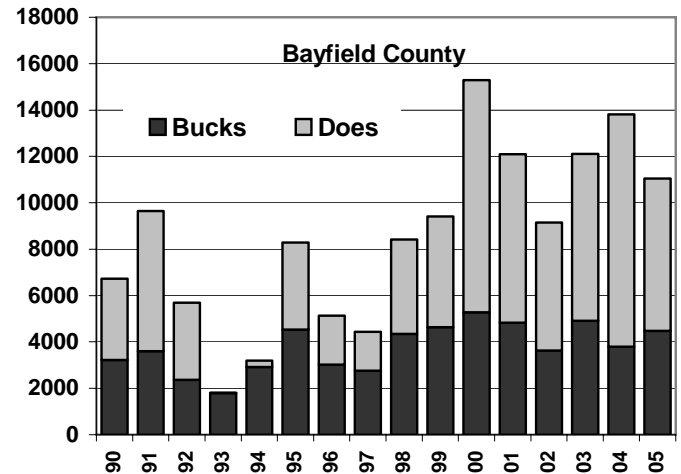
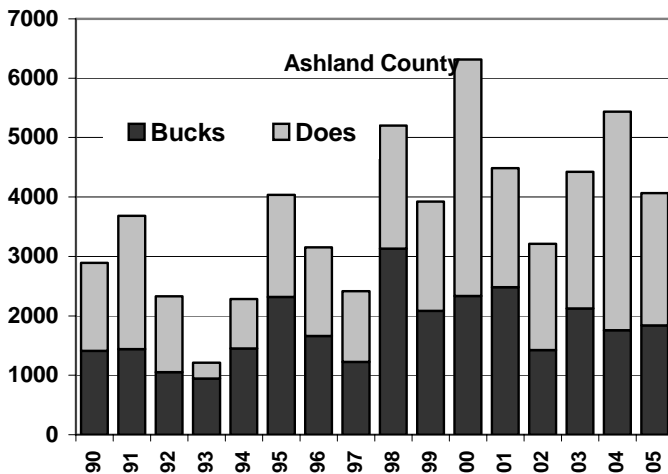
The 2005 Deer Seasons

For many people 2005 was a 'return to normal' deer season compared to 2004. There were no Earn-A-Buck (EAB) units in the state and there were fewer T-zone units, especially in northern WI.

In almost all of our deer management units (DMUs) buck harvest increased and antlerless harvest decreased compared to 2004. These changes were especially large in units which were EAB units in '04. The EAB regulations, which decreased buck harvest in '04 in these units, resulted in more bucks in the population which showed up in the '05 harvest. The decreased '04 buck harvest in EAB units also allowed more bucks to live another year, hence more older bucks with larger bodies and antlers were harvested in '05. Great hunting conditions of snow cover, mild temperatures, and deer still in rut during the first part of the gun season all helped to increase the number of bucks that hunters saw and harvested.

Deer populations across most of the state and in all of our units have decreased from the record high levels of the early 2000's. This population decrease resulted from the large harvests of antlerless deer in recent years. Large antlerless harvests were accomplished by very liberal hunting season regulations which encouraged (T-zone season) or required (EAB season) hunters to harvest antlerless deer.

The very mild winter of 2005-'06 will result in above average winter survival of deer and an above average fawn crop in 2006. Deer populations in most of our DMUs will increase to levels which require them to be in herd control status (i.e. T-zone regulations) for 2006.



Urban Deer

With a large deer population across almost all of Wisconsin, many of our urban areas also have large deer populations. In many of our cities the deer population has exceeded the social carrying capacity: there are more deer than most of the public wants, more than they are willing to tolerate.

The city of Superior formed a 'Deer Committee' that developed a Deer Management Plan that was approved by the City Council. This plan includes multiple methods to reduce deer-human conflicts and for reducing the deer population. Methods include:

- Prohibiting deer feeding
- Expanding areas open to archery deer hunting (discharge of archery weapons)
- Providing information on how to avoid/reduce deer browsing to garden and ornamental plants
- Providing vehicle drivers with safe driving information
- Deer herd reduction in hot spot areas by the Wisconsin Whitetail Bowhunters Association (WWBA)



Superior uses regular archery hunting as the primary method to manage deer numbers in relatively large blocks of unpopulated areas within the City. But, due to human safety concerns, archery deer hunting by the general public is not allowed in many areas of the City.

The Deer Committee solicited and received substantial input from the public to identify areas with significant deer-human conflicts. Many of these areas where the public desired a reduction in the deer herd were designated as "hot spot areas". Volunteer archery hunters, trained and supervised by WWBA, have removed nearly 400 deer from these hot spot areas as since this program was implemented in August 2003.

Almost all of the deer harvested under the hot spot program have been given away free to people who had previously signed up to receive a field-dressed deer. In 2005 six deer were donated to the State funded Venison Donation Program. Meat from these deer was distributed to area food shelves.



A "browse line" shows how high the mouths of deer can reach. Beneath it, little forest vegetation remains. *Photo by Jim Nachel.*

The cities of Ashland and Washburn have also created Deer Committees to address deer issues in their communities. Both of these committees have developed and are implementing deer management plans to reduce deer-human conflicts and to reduce the deer population through archery hunting. In 2005, both communities applied for and received a Nuisance Deer Removal permit from the DNR. Qualified archery hunters, as agents of these two Cities, were issued deer permits which allowed them to harvest additional deer within these Cities. Under this program 44 deer in Ashland and 42 deer in Washburn were harvested. Regulated archery deer hunting is an effective method to help reduce deer populations and deer-human conflicts in urban areas in a cost-effective manner.

Forest Openings

Maintenance of small grassy openings within blocks of publicly managed forestlands continues to be a high priority for wildlife habitat management. These openings provide necessary habitat for many animals such as flickers, cedar waxwings, chestnut-sided warblers, mourning warblers, broad-winged hawks, smooth green snakes, leopard frogs, badgers, bear, and they provide critical feeding area to deer after severe winters. Encroachment of trees and shrubs into forest openings is a constant threat. Maintaining forest openings helps keep this important habitat on our public forests.

The four Lake Superior Basin counties have approximately 2,000 openings on State and County Forest lands that are maintained by the DNR and County Forest Departments. Openings are maintained by a variety of methods including mowing, hand cutting, and herbicide treatment of woody vegetation. Access trails, used as hunter walking trails, are maintained along with the openings. There is approximately ½ mile of hunter walking trails maintained for every mowable opening.

Ashland County Forest: Mowing was used to maintain 10 openings totaling 11 acres and 6 miles of hunter walking trails.

Bayfield County Forest: A total of 93 openings comprising 111 acres were maintained. Bayfield County Forestry Department maintained 53 openings by mowing and the other 40 openings were maintained by hand cutting.

Douglas County Forest: DNR and the county forestry department cooperatively maintained 98 openings, 94 by mowing and 4 by hand cutting.

Iron County Forest: Twenty-seven openings, including the Birch Hill “prairie” were maintained, totaling 37 acres.

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